

FRIGHT TIME

3 Spine-tingling Tales
for Young Readers

- THE GRAVECHANGERS
- HAUNTING AT HOWLING OAK
- THE HOUSE IN THE MIST



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THE GRAVECHANGERS

by Jane Ehlers

I

It's not as if I haven't tried to be a regular guy—baseball, soccer, hanging out with my friends, jamming with our band, which we call Plymouth Rock—but I honestly can't think of a time when weird things weren't somehow happening to us. Me and my family, I mean. Sooner or later, just when you think things are starting to look normal at Jonathan Valentine's house, something happens, or somebody strange comes to visit, or something or other disappears.

FRIGHT TIME

And I'm Jonathan Valentine.

"Have you been digging with my 18th-century letter opener again, Jane?" My dad's always calling something like that to my mom. He's always looking for something, something that's usually right in front of him.

"I haven't seen it today, Harvey," she'll call back to him from a small greenhouse they built alongside the living room. My mom likes to do her work with plants around her, so she moved her desk into the greenhouse. "But this old silver shaving brush is great for dusting off the clay pots we found at the excavation!" My mom's an archaeologist. She digs up old stuff to study how people lived hundreds of years ago.

"Jane! Not again!"

Don't get me wrong, though. They're nice people, my parents. I mean, they're not geeks or anything. Not at all. My mom's actually a college professor. It's just that the things they do for a living just aren't the kind of things other kids' parents do. So no matter what I do to blend in with the rest of the crowd, whether I like it or not, the Valentine family stands out.

For one thing, you can't hide for too long with a name like Valentine. To make matters worse,

THE GRAVECHANGERS

my dad's an antique dealer. He has an old-fashioned shop in an old-fashioned house in our old-fashioned village. In Massachusetts, where we live, people come from all over to see old colonial stuff, old houses, old villages, old landmarks, the Paul Revere thing. The Pilgrims. The Boston Tea Party. The American Revolution. People looking for old stuff haunt antique shops.

Dad calls his shop "Emporium Galorium: Valentine's Antiques." It has a big fancy sign that swings from a pole outside the door. Nothing unusual about that. Nothing, except it's shaped like a big heart. Why not draw even more attention to us, Dad? I sometimes wonder to myself. I'd never say it to him, though. My dad's one of the nicest dads you'd ever want to meet. He's just, well, eccentric.

That means weird. And let's face it, Emporium Galorium looks like the inside of a storybook. The old kind like *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Pied Piper*. The thing about old stories like those is, the pictures are pretty, but sooner or later, you know something dangerous is going to happen.

"And look at this angel on top," my mom was

FRIGHT TIME

saying to another lady. They were having coffee in the greenhouse. My mom was showing her photos of gravestones from one of the old cemeteries in our town. It was getting to be a cloudy, breezy summer afternoon, hurricane season.

We have a lot of old cemeteries in Massachusetts. Some of the headstones are 300 years old! My mom studies the fancy ones with angels and interesting sayings carved into them. Archaeologists really dig that sort of thing, she likes to say. One of her corny jokes.

“I ought to be going,” Mom’s friend said as she stood up and gathered her things. “Looks like that wind is picking up.”

Twang! My mom and her friend jumped a mile. Jamie, one of our band members, had played an awesome chord on her electric guitar and the sound was turned up to damage-level.

“Oops, sorry,” she said, turning red. “I hope nobody heard that.”

Adam hit the cymbals and stomped his bass drum. “Nah,” he said. “I doubt they heard a thing in there. Crank it up, Jamie.”

We peeked into the greenhouse from the living room where Mom lets us play.

“Does everyone have a ride home today?”